

Dear Senta, members of the Chamberlain family, ladies and gentlemen:

I am Eugene Commins, a colleague and friend of Owen since 1960. The speaker who will follow me-Charles Morehouse -was a student of Owen's. The speaker after Charles is Herbert Steiner- who collaborated with Owen in research for nearly 5 decades. I was neither a student nor a collaborator of Owen's- just a friend. About the only thing of significance that I ever did for Owen was to take his dog for a walk. But Owen and I did converse often, especially in recent years, and we got to know each other quite well. On this basis, allow me to offer several brief observations about him.

Owen taught physics, mainly upper division undergraduate classes, for a long time- for more than 40 years. He was a kind-hearted, sympathetic, and modest person, as well as an outstanding teacher, and students found him to be very accessible- in principle. In practice that accessibility was limited because it was very difficult for students to get into Owen's office. It was difficult for anyone to get into that office- because it was so cluttered. You see, Owen held firmly to the belief that a clean desk is the sign of an impoverished mind. Owen's desk was piled two or three feet high with books, papers, correspondence, and journal articles. The pile was so precarious that as Herb Steiner puts it, the soft flight of a butterfly into that room could have caused an avalanche. And it wasn't just the desk- there were piles of books and papers on the floor, chairs, and windowsills. So, Owen, and only Owen, could get into or out of that office- and only because he was thin. Once in there, however, he could locate whichever paper he wanted from those chaotic piles, with uncanny precision. That was Owen's unorthodox but effective filing system. On the other hand, for him to interact with his many eager students, one of the guys in the machine shop finally had to put up an extra blackboard in the hallway.

In the last decade of his life, Owen suffered from a progressive neurological illness that inexorably robbed him of his mobility. None of us but Senta and the immediate family and caregivers can know how difficult, frustrating, and painful his life must have become. But without any doubt he bore it with the utmost grace and good humor, as was clear to my wife Ulla and me whenever we saw him. During visits or on excursions with him and Senta, he was always anxious to know what was new and exciting, and what was happening in our lives. This even though he was wheelchair-bound and could hardly move.

This leads me to say how impressed and moved we have been by Senta's remarkable courage, energy, and fortitude in these recent difficult years. She kept Owen in contact with his friends and the external world and tended to his every need, against all odds. She kept him moving- she kept him alive, psychologically as well as physically. There is no greater devotion than that.